

Supramental Consciousness and Human Evolution

by Sraddhalu Ranade

The talk started with chanting OM.

About one hundred years ago, Sri Aurobindo withdrew from active politics in order to pursue a line of development that he realised was far more important for humanity. Having passed through a series of spiritual experiences, including the experience of Brahman and of the Immanent Divine in the world, he was given a series of revelations about the nature of the further development of human evolution. Pursuing that line, it became obvious that unless there was a radical change of consciousness, human evolution would not succeed in making that next necessary leap. Dedicating himself entirely to that pursuit over the early years of his sadhana in Pondicherry, soon thereafter joined by the Mother, he pursued this line and realised in himself that higher level of consciousness which he refers to in his writings as the Supermind, the higher consciousness which is necessary for the next step in human evolution.

During the period 1914-1921, Sri Aurobindo wrote in his monthly journal *Arya* most of his major works, six or seven of them at least, simultaneously, and they were all written from his experience and his realisations, including the realisation of the Supermind and the transformation of his own mind by that higher consciousness which was in a process of development and stabilisation.

In 1926, there was a capital step forward in this effort when the Overmental consciousness was brought down into the physical body of Sri Aurobindo and established in the material world – in himself first. This is to be understood in the larger context of the whole process that he was pursuing, and only then can we

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better understand what was happening then and what is happening today.

The realisation of a higher consciousness can be had on its own level; for example, the individual consciousness can rise into the Intuitive consciousness or into the Overmind or the Supermind, and know it on its own level then and return, leaving the mind and the rest of the life largely unchanged. Or it is possible to bring down that higher consciousness into the lower – first as an influence, then as a more and more direct action, and eventually to establish that higher consciousness in the lower as the dominant power, transforming the lower by that higher. This process of transformation at first involves a series of descents and a time needed to assimilate and stabilise the transformation, but the realisation of the higher consciousness itself can take place much sooner.

The Overmental consciousness had already been realised by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and it was the struggle to bring it down and establish it in the lower ranges which was the next focus of their effort. And the Overmental was established in their mind, the mental consciousness, in the life-force, the subtle-physical body and then eventually in the gross physical itself. This was a capital step in the whole evolutionary effort, because unless the Overmental Consciousness is established the Supramental Consciousness cannot come down in its purity, in its direct action.

The Mother observed that in 1926 she noticed the presence of Sri Krishna hovering around Sri Aurobindo for some time, for a few days. There was a special presence in the air in the whole community of the Ashram, a presence of delight, preparing, intensifying ... and then one day, she said, she saw this form of Sri Krishna enter Sri Aurobindo physically. She went and commented to him and he simply nodded. But that was the capital step, the establishment of the Overmental in the physical, which was the assurance that the Supramental also would be established in the physical eventually. That was the point where Sri Aurobindo formally withdrew from direct personal contact with the sadhaks in order to dedicate his entire concentration to bringing down the Supramental into the

physical. The Mother was given formal responsibility for all the sadhaks and their sadhana in the Ashram and outside the Ashram.

I remember a narration of one of the very old sadhikas in the Ashram, her name is Swarnadi. She was one of the earliest disciples who came to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother even before she visited Pondicherry. She was at that time a housewife in Bengal. Through correspondence she was in touch with Sri Aurobindo and he used to guide her and, of course, there was the direct action of his help on her sadhana. She described how she had, seated in Bengal, a series of experiences which she did not understand. It was only when she wrote to Sri Aurobindo that his explanations would come. One that she described was like this: while she was swinging the child in the cradle she would go into the meditation and sometimes into trance. Once she had the sudden awareness of the whole subtle being, a subtle body, and she saw the seven chakras within herself and the rising flow of the Kundalini energy and the channels of *Ida*, *Pingala*, *Sushumna*. These are all things that we read about and see in pictures and books, but she experienced that within herself; and not knowing what it was but trusting that she was being led, she wrote to Sri Aurobindo for an explanation.

On one of these occasions, around that time – in 1926 or just after – she had an experience in which Sri Aurobindo pulled her out of her body. She found herself floating above held by his hand and drawn rapidly a great distance and brought to above Pondicherry. Then, she said, she was taken into a room where she met a beautiful lady and Sri Aurobindo told her, “This is the Mother and hereafter she will be responsible for your sadhana.” Many years later, when she came to the Ashram physically, she was taken around to some of the houses and she was taken to the house which is presently the Archives. She says that on entering that space she recognised it as the location where she was introduced to the Mother. This is where the Mother had stayed in the very early period of the Ashram, before they all shifted to the present main building.

These are some indications of that time when Sri Aurobindo formally gave the responsibility of the sadhana to the Mother as the Divine Shakti. He himself withdrew from direct contact, physically, but

maintained the spiritual contact inwardly and directly on the spiritual level, and indirectly through correspondence with all the sadhaks. Often his writing would go on for eight hours at a time. There was an arrangement between Sri Aurobindo and the Mother that one of them would always be awake. In daytime the Mother had to look after affairs of the Ashram as well, during which time he would take his sleep. Then when she would go to retire he would be awake through most of the night, during which time the writing of letters would go on. The intensity of the Supramental Consciousness building up on him, around his body, was so great that it would be unbearable to most people, and it was a strict instruction of the Mother that those who were working on the first floor, outside Sri Aurobindo's room, were not to look at him directly. They had to come, do their work and go away, avoiding looking across. Of course there were some who could not avoid having a casual glance at least, and the image they saw was always described as one of great divinity and beauty. During the time of the Darshan, in those days three times in a year, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother would both meet all the sadhaks together physically. When at some point someone wrote that the gap between the February Darshan and the August Darshan was too great and they would like to have another Darshan in between, Sri Aurobindo wrote back that, for him it would mean a significant delay in the work, because every time that there was a Darshan he had to reduce the intensity of the spiritual power in and around him so that it could be bearable to people who came to see him, so it would affect his work if another Darshan was added in between.

In one of his letters to Nirodbaran, he humorously described how he had "caught the Supramental by the tail." Having caught it, to create a constant pull to bring it down into the physical was the task that he had dedicated himself to. In his own consciousness the Supramental had already been established in the mind, in the vital, and to a great degree in the subtle-physical. By the time he left his body even the subtle-physical was fully transformed by the Supramental. The last part, establishing it in the physical consciousness, was the great challenge that they worked for. And it is here that Sri Aurobindo makes a very important distinction, which it is useful for us to understand, between the Overmind and the Supermind. He said that when he first wrote of the Supermind in the *Arya*, his experience and view of the Supermind

was from the range of the mind consciousness, as distinct from, later, the physical consciousness. And we will see the difference. When he experienced the descent of the Overmind it was seen as the lower working of the Supermind. But later, when that consciousness was established in the physical and the resistance of the physical had to be overcome, then he said it became clear that the Overmind was not the lower working of Supermind. There was a gap, and the Supermind proper – which he also refers to as the Gnostic Consciousness, Gnostic Supermind, Gnostic Knowledge – the Supermind proper involved a distinction. The distinction is this: the Supermind proper is a separate grade of consciousness which is one of Oneness – Oneness indivisible – which, if it were to manifest and become the world directly, would have created a world which was Divine from the beginning, which never would experience the division of consciousness, which would never have experienced the involution, the loss into Inconscience and the emergence back through evolution. In order to be able to experience division, it was necessary for the Supermind to take a step down, a step down to division. In the highest part of the Overmind there is still an experience of Oneness, but a Oneness that accepts the possibility of division. This fine distinction between the highest part of the Overmind and the Supermind proper, he said, was in fact suggested in the Veda when it is said that the face of Truth is covered by a Golden Lid. There is this covering which, being a Golden Lid, itself appearing to be of the nature of the Truth, seems to be the Truth itself. He explained how in the earlier times, whenever this ascent to the Supermind was attempted, this distinction was missed even by most of the great Rishis of the Vedic period and later.

In the Tantric phase again there was an attempt to realise the Supermind, coming very close to this distinction but not realising it entirely. The result was, he said, that because the descent of the Overmind was seen as equivalent to Supermind and yet the Overmind could not overcome the extreme resistance of Inconscience, it was concluded that Matter cannot be changed. Therefore it was considered that the world is unreal and has to be abandoned. This fine distinction, he said, was the key to the transformation of Matter itself. It was that highest working of the pure Supermind, the Gnostic Consciousness, that Sri Aurobindo was bringing down during that later phase. It was that which was established in his mind, vital and the subtle-physical, until